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The Christian's Gold

AND THE

Kingdom's Wealth

"In this age of the 'Square Deal' let us not forget that God also is interested."

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOLD AND THE KINGDOM'S WEALTH

A PLEA FOR INTELLIGENT, DELIBERATE, AND SYSTEMATIC GIVING

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"Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."
—Malachi iii. 10.

"Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come."—1 Corinthians xvi. 2.

John F. Goucher
No.

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOLD
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KINGDOM'S WEALTH

AS REGARDS material things, there are two perennial questions in the minds of earnest Christian people. "What means shall we take for the adequate support of the ever needy church?" "How much ought I to give to the church and its benevolences, and on what principle ought I to base my contributions?" These questions are among the most serious we have to face, and until both are answered there is no settled peace for either Church or Christian.

I desire to suggest a method of Church Finance which I have personally practiced for years, with the greatest of satisfaction, and which has been tested in many churches, with unfailing success wherever given a fair and complete trial. This method of Christian giving which I am about to suggest might well be

called a "short cut" to church prosperity, for I am convinced that it would, if made universal, revolutionize our temporal conditions. All short cuts are rugged and difficult, calling for heroic sacrifice and endeavor. Mine is no exception. But it is ancient and authoritative. It is "the King's Highway." The wisest man of old approved it—"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase." The last prophet of the Mosaic dispensation thundered its enforcement—"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." This is the key to the whole problem. For the temporal part of our worship God asks that we lay aside at least one-tenth of our income and devote it to his service.

Let me relieve your minds at the outset by saying that it is not my purpose to impose this rule as an obligation upon this church or any member of it. That I do not think it would be profitable for us to enter into any prolonged controversy on the subject, but that if any Christian is perplexed as to his personal

duty in this matter, or if any convert desires help in adjusting the obligations of his new life to practical conduct, this method is offered as one which has given universal satisfaction to those who have honestly tried it.

I shall be met at once with this question: "Is not the law of the tenth a Jewish law, no longer binding upon God's people?" But am not I as good as a Jew? Should my loyalty to God's kingdom be less than his? Shall a son be less generous than a servant? But the principle of the tithe is not Jewish law alone. It is an ancient and universal religious principle. Four hundred years before God spake to Moses Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec. A few years later young Jacob, fleeing from a home in which he was no longer welcome, his only possessions a mantle and a staff, met God on the way, in a vision of the night, and promised him: "If thou wilt feed and clothe me, and bring me back again, of all that thou givest me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Then when Moses came he

incorporated this principle into Jewish law, and evermore it was the duty of the chosen people to render unto God by tenths,—most of the time paying two tenths, and in some years three.

The Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and other pagan nations practiced the principle of the tithe. If godless heathen cheerfully brought tithes to the worship of their idols, what ought the disciple of the Son of God to do? "But did not Paul say, 'Let every man give as God hath prospered him?'" Yes, over and above his regular contributions,—a "special collection" for the impoverished saints at Jerusalem. "But did he not say, 'We are no longer under law but under grace?'" To be sure, but isn't grace a queer weapon with which to rob God? "But did he not say, 'Not grudgingly, nor of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver?'" No doubt, but some men can give a tenth cheerfully while others almost suffer nervons prostration if the stewards "pass the hat." Cheerfulness

and grudgingness depend not on amount but on disposition.

If the pious old Jew, grubbing away on his rocky hillside, with spade in one hand and sword in the other, could dig out one dollar for God for every nine he kept, what does love demand of me, in this fertile, peaceful, liberty-encircled, sun-kissed, shower-blessed, enlightened Christian land? If faithful Abraham, who had only seven pages of my Oxford Bible for his gospel, if patient Job, who never heard of Jesus, if Jacob, and David, and Daniel, and Ezra, and Isaiah, looking forward by faith alone to a Christ who should come after, felt bound to pay God their tenth; what of me, who have heard the blessed story of the babe in Bethlehem, who have drunk of the water of life, who have met and loved the Good Shepherd, who have read over from childhood, "Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In my Father's house are many mansions," "Love never faileth," who have seen by faith Jesus lifted up upon the cross, have seen the Lord arise from the dead, who

have heard the voice of the Spirit saying to my soul, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee, for his name's sake?"

Jesus commended this ancient principle. He says: "Ye tithe mint, and rue, and all manner of herb, . . . these ought ye to have done." The apostles must, certainly, with all loyal Jews, have practiced it, and never, so far as any bible statement indicates, did they revoke it. Does it not seem that if Jesus had intended that so ancient and conspicuous a duty should be abolished he or his apostles would surely have mentioned it? On this very argument we defend the sanctity of the Sabbath, that, though Jesus never mentiones it, he does not revoke it.

The tithe principle would seem therefore to be as obligatory upon the modern as upon the ancient church. Indeed, for many hundreds of years, history tells us, the church did observe the law of the tithe. But papal abuse, antinomian lawlessness, and personal selfishness well-nigh drove it from the face of the earth. In view of all her splendid

achievement in other things, what a backsliding on the part of the church in the matter of her temporal relations with God! Once the ardent convert, persecuted by the heathen, laughed at by the world, with property and life in danger from mob and torch, came and gladly laid down his tenth at the Master's feet. Today we go about with a subscription paper, a kind of yard-stick by which each man can measure his own gift by his neighbor's, or with a mite box, or a bowl of oyster stew, or a saucer of maple syrup, and bid the people from the highways and hedges, come in,—to the gospel feast?—to contribute fifteen cents apiece to help carry on our churches! Oh, how the Master must look down upon Zion with apologetic shame, when he sees her leaders worrying over the outcome of the next ice-cream social.

Nothing here is to be understood as an attack upon the more social features of church life, when carried on with dignity, if the primary object is a larger social fraternity, even where admission fees are charged and a little surplus

secured. That is another question, to be discussed apart and on its own merits. But, in general, having abandoned God's plan of church finances, the modern Christian makes it a study to see how little he can give and ease his conscience, and the modern pastor, who is compelled to be a money-raiser, must make it his study to see how much he can get the people to give by working upon the emotions and enthusiasm of his hearers. Over against all this I now make a plea for a Scriptual giving of the tenth on four distinct grounds.

I.

IT PAYS GOD. Very few of the members of our churches pay one-tenth of their income to the Lord' treasury. Suppose now, every member of your average church should begin tomorrow morning to lay aside one-tenth of his income for this purpose. What would result? First, the church would meet all its current expenses promptly, without trouble or embarrassment. The pastor would be spared his

frequent benevolence "agonies," but, next Easter morning, for example, after preaching an Easter sermon, he would make the simple announcement, "This is Foreign Missions Day; come and lay your gifts upon this table." And the thing would be done. No blackboard, no trick, no "springing" a collection on a reluctant congregation. The claims of pastor, district superintendent, bishops and superannuates would be paid in full, and a large payment made yearly on that ancient debt.

Let me bring a few facts in support of this. And I shall ask pardon for appealing at once to my own experience, for I know most about that. My first charge, a village circuit, had paid to all benevolences the year before my coming $49. That year it paid $150, and the second year, $200. A large part of this was tithe money. A church to which I was appointed soon after that I found almost hopelessly burdened with a debt which had been contracted in the building of a splendid new edifice. The first year of my appointment there the church, for

the first time in years, paid its full apportionment, the largest in its history. A good portion of this was tithe money. The following year, when the tithing principle was introduced on a larger scale, our Sunday School and Woman's Missionary Society nearly doubled all former gifts, and our total benevolent offerings far exceeded our apportionments. The third year the debt, which it had been prophesied by friends and enemies of the church alike, would never be paid and would bankrupt the church, was entirely cancelled, and the church has led a prosperous life ever since. This was not all done by tithing, but tithing made it possible. In the next church I served, where the tithing idea was hospitably received, the general missionary offering increased in four years 1000 per cent. One day a young lady teacher called at my door and left me $2.50 for missions, and a few days later $3.00, and a few days afterward, $3.00 more. And a neighboring pastor, within whose charge she was teaching, told me that she had just paid him $10

for the same object. All out of a country teacher's wages. She looked very happy, and thanked me for teaching her to tithe.

It was at about this time that the pastor of one of Michigan's leading churches wrote me that his large gift to help cancel the great Missionary Society debt was contributed by two of his tithing members. The pastor of a large church in Western Michigan, where the tithing plan had been introduced, wrote me: "Our church expenses are being met as never before. A young man came to me the other evening and asked me to direct him to some worthy object of benevolence, as his tithe was accumulating. At least eight members of our Official Board are now giving a tenth, and others are laboring under increasing conviction on the subject." I inquired of a village pastor in Northern Michigan how tithing worked in his church. I condense his laconic reply: "A small band of ten per cent. of membership, with average ability to give, last year paid over 25 per cent. total church re-

ceipts. Last year all old debts cancelled, pastor's salary increased, benevolences 400 per cent. in advance of two years ago. This year finances very easy. Stewards rub hands and laugh at way it comes in without work. Benevolences will reach 800 per cent. advance of two years ago. Stewards recommended last meeting to increase pastor's salary $100 to use up surplus funds.''

One of the secrets of the remarkable success of the late Dr. A. J. Gordon's Clarendon St. Baptist Church, Boston, was its almost universal custom of tithing, and the astonishing deliverance from financial despair a few years ago of Wesley Chapel, Cincinnati, the old mother church of Ohio Methodism, by a resort to the tithing principle, is matter of common knowledge today.

''But your scheme of a tenth is narrow and formal,'' someone objects. ''My property is all the Lord's; I am just his steward.'' Very good. I salute you. But surely, if all your money is God's, you won't object to letting him have the use of a tenth part of it, will you?

Many of the Lord's stewards like to use his money mostly for their own comfort. God likes to have his money in circulation. He can use one dollar better in his own possession than he can his whole ten in the bottom of your pocket.

On a careful estimate of the aggregate income of the people of one of my early churches—and that during a period of financial panic—I discovered that universal tithing would pay all our current expenses, even when increased by many per cent., which was greatly needed, pay all interest, double our benevolences, and pay from $1,000 to $2,000 yearly on our debt.

How God's ancient and simple plan would relieve us of the grinding burdens of church finance. And have we treated him fairly until we have tested his plan? How our stewards, relieved of the eternal agony of current expenses, could spend their time looking after the spiritual interests of Christ's flock. How our godly women could give their energies to the Master's service, if they could be relieved of doughnuts and embroid-

ery. Oh, when I think of the tremendous waste of holy energy necessitated by our infidel methods of church work, my heart burns within me.

II.

I PLEAD for the tithe, secondly, because it pays ME. A glance at the national history of the Jews reveals the fact that, just as they observed the law of the tithe, they prospered. But when Jehovah was forgotten, and his Sabbaths used for traffic, and his treasury robbed for self and idol gods, then disaster and desolation came, and the locust, and the palmer-worm, and the alien army, destroyed their fields and cities. Would it be a sure symptom of fanaticism to believe that the Father, who numbers the hairs of our heads, also gives a special care to those who keep his law? A wealthy layman of Chicago has for years published a pamphlet in which he gives hundreds of testimonials from business men all over the country showing that they have been specially cared for and prospered since

obedience to this principle.

And there is a natural reason for all this. How much stronger is a man for business with a clear conscience. When a man can step out and face the world and say: "I've tried to do my duty to God and man," he can defy men and devils to overthrow him. He can say: "If I rise, I rise with a clear conscience; if I fail and go to the poor-house, I go as a king." It adds buoyancy to his spirit and courage to his endeavors. Tithing compels system in family finance and saves its cost by cultivating thrifty and economical methods. So that tithers more than once have told me that their nine-tenths go farther than their ten-tenths used to do.

A very intelligent young lady told me five or six years ago that her salary had been increased nearly every year since she began tithing. And less than a week ago one of my trustees told me that twelve years ago, early in his business career, he promised to pay God the tenth, and that nearly every year since that time his salary had been increased,

while the last raise, just granted, had almost doubled anything before received, affording a splendid income. I said to one of my stewards one hard winter: "The tithing system would save our debt-burdened church." "It is saving me," he quickly replied. "I wouldn't dare ask God to bless my factory unless I dealt justly with him, and though these hard times have paralyzed my business, I have had twice as much as my competitor." Another steward told me, after I had preached on tithing: "I never had the faith to practice this before, though I have believed in it, but we began last Monday morning, and this has been, financially, the happiest week of my life."

Yes, and it pays spiritually as well as temporally. It leaves one's glad heart free for service. It increases capacity for devotion. It forbids a paralysis of generosity, and makes it impossible to narrow down one's gifts to God, as so often happens when one increases in wealth and its absorptions. One could hardly grow covetous, or forget his God,

while he paid each week his tenth in to the Lord's treasury.

III.

BECAUSE it is PLEASANT I plead for the tithe plan. Many a man of my acquaintance could tell you today how precious has become that quiet corner in the house where the little tithe box is kept. It makes the house sacred when you have somewhere hidden in it a little ark of God containing his treasure. It makes your ledger a holier book when one page is a God-page. It gives a new worth to your check-book when every now and then a stub records your loyalty to the King. How cheerfully, too, one pays out his tenth when he recalls that for every dollar that he uses for God, God has given him nine for his own use. This plan lifts our giving far above all emotional, impulsive, or selfish motives for doing our duty. And how pleasant to have the financial success of God's work shifted from our shoulders to his. If the minister or the benevolences fall short our conscience is clear, if we have

done our full duty. God then becomes responsible for results.

It is pleasant because it is fair, fair to rich and poor alike. "But would you expect the poor to tithe?" Why not? The worst thing we can do for the poor man is to rob him of the joy of a whole-hearted and self-sacrificing service of his God, or to pauperize him by paying for his gospel. If God owns the "cattle upon a thousand hills" He can manage to furnish the poor man enough extra money to be honest with himself and the Kingdom. But the objections are not from the poor. I never yet heard a poor Christian find fault with this plan, though often the question of how it is to be done is serious. The wealthy are often the ones who find the scheme so difficult to comprehend and to practice. And you can see the reason; as men grow wealthy their tenth becomes so large it becomes more and more difficult to part with it. Oh, if men could once learn the joy of a large gift. Think of the luxury of laying down $500, or $1,000, or $10,000, as your tithe, and

then standing off one side and waiting to see what glorious things can be done with it.

How many noble Christian men, perplexed as to duty, ask themselves daily, "What ought I to give? How much can I afford this year?" The tenth plan furnishes the solution. This may explain in part the rapid growth of the tithe idea. Twenty years ago tithing was looked upon as a freak, and it required a courageous man to confess it. Today I could find you scores of prominent laymen, and scores of ministers,—poor ministers on our northern circuits, prominent ministers in our city pulpits, who practice from year to year the tenth plan. In the Christian Endeavor Society is the great Tenth Legion; in the Epworth Leagues of the world the Christian Stewardship Enrollment. All are pledged to the principle of the tenth for God.

This way of giving is pleasant because it is dignified, and wholly worthy of the Christian church. It would do much to drive pauperism and beggary from our midst. How much of pleading and

scheming, and campaigning, how much shameful humiliation and compromising with the world it would banish from the church!

IV.

THIS way of paying our debt to God thus becomes the way of duty. The golden grain of the mission fields, ripe for the holy harvest, is left to rot upon the ground for want of reapers. The dense populations of our great cities are crying for light and God. Yet our churches are loaded with debt, financially embarrassed, and our Christian communities honey-combed with pauperizing methods of church finance. We can afford to travel all over the continent, all over Europe, to attend conventions, buy phonographs and automobiles, build fine houses, wear princely raiment, make costly presents, but we can't afford to be honest with God.

"I would begin to tithe if others would," you say, "but it isn't fair for only a few." I know it, but why deny yourself a great joy, or God his much-

needed portion, because others do? "But I'm in debt. Ought a man to give before he pays his debts?" Well, do you buy Christmas or birthday presents before you pay your debts? Or candy for the children, or valentines, or souvenir post-cards, for your friends? And would you refuse to help a starving neighbor until all debts were paid? Indeed, by managing to keep a little in debt a man could justify himself in refusing all charity, and all religious obligations, his whole life long.

But, after all, this tithing is not giving, it itself is debt-paying. Whom do you owe first of all? Hasn't God a large account against you? Who advanced your capital, your life, your talent, your health, and the favorable conditions which have enabled you to make money? "It is God that giveth thee the power to get wealth." Why not make Him a "preferred creditor?" "But I may not have my income after this year." Very well, when you don't have it, you won't have to tithe it. Oh, Brother, remember who gave you the skill, the educa-

tion, the genius, that has made your success possible. "How much owest thou unto my Lord?"

"But," you say, "I am not a member of this church, my membership is off yonder in another town." That's handy, isn't it? But does that cancel your obligation to God? Has he ceased to be good to you? "But we don't expect to live here much longer." Indeed, you won't; you'll soon be in another world. Did you know that a church letter, or the prospect of moving away sometime, is a most convenient device for dodging God? When the Father refuses longer to give you food, when he ceases to send his rain and his sun upon you, when he no longer answers your prayers, when he snatches from you the hope of heaven, and when Jesus announces from the sky that his atoning blood no longer avails for you, then you may say: "I have no debt to God." Till then you owe him your life, your breath, and all the joys you have.

Tithing, being a duty, is practicable. "But how shall I determine my tenth?

My business is such that I can't tell exactly what my tenth is?'' It may be difficult, but it can be done. Suppose some rich friend should say to you: ''Keep a strict account of your business and at the end of a year I will make you a Christmas present equal to one-tenth of your income.'' Do you think you could figure? Count out your tenth as fast as it comes, and lay it aside before it is spent. It's the spent dollar that's hard to give to God. Call it no longer yours, but His. Say: ''This is my Master's; I have no more right to it than I have to my neighbor's money.'' You say you could not live on what would be left. Suppose your salary or wages should be cut ten per cent. You'd live. But God lets you have the whole ten-tenths for your income. Count this your extra earning ability, and thank God for it. Then do not hoard it, keep it circulating.

Then so readjust your habits of thrift and economy that you can pay your tithe without embarrassment. This may demand sacrifice. But oh, in this

day, when the sacrifices of the Christian are so small, compared with the days of the apostles and martyrs, and his social and spiritual privileges so great, is God asking too much when he pleads for just one little tenth of our abundance for his service? Is it not time that the Christian church began to put a difference between itself and the world? The world goes on, spending its money, strength, and intellect in a mad scramble after fad and fashion, straining every nerve to keep up appearances, and the church rushes pell mell after the world, and sometimes even exceeds it in the lust for place and prominence. Let the church once turn about and for ten years forget the frenzied superficialities of the world, devoting her strength to a supreme effort to usher in Messiah's Kingdom,—the world would be astonished at the regeneration. The church, too, would be astonished at the turn of the tide toward godliness. Pomp, and pride, and luxury, and competition would give place to humility, charity, industry, temperance, fraternity. The world has caught the church by the

hand, and is leading her a merry dance, but, oh, before God's kingdom shall come, and his will be done on earth as in heaven, the church must take the reins, assert her divine right to guide the world, and set the fashion of righteousness, obedience, and conformity to the will of God.

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

(Preached in the First Methodist Episcopal Church, Pontiac, Mich., May 9, 1909.)

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